



Ahmed Sékou Touré, 1922 - 1984

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Before becoming President of Guinea at independence in 1958 – a position he held until his death in 1984 – Ahmed Sékou Touré led a trade union federation.

At an early stage in his presidency, Sékou Touré led his country to vote against the neo-colonial arrangement known as the “French Community”. Guinea was the only one of many former French African colonies to vote against.

This refusal of neo-colonialism was the heroic act for which Sékou Touré has never been forgotten, or in the case of the French imperialists, forgiven.

Later, Sékou Touré became well-known as one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement. Guinea attracted personalities including the exiled South African singer [Miriam Makeba](#), who became Guinea's ambassador to the United Nations, and her then husband the US Black Power leader [Stokely Carmichael](#), who changed his name to Kwame Ture.

Yet in spite of the celebrity he enjoyed in his lifetime, there is surprisingly little of Sékou Touré's legacy visible on the Internet today. Likewise in hard copy, his output has been difficult to find. A 1979 book of Sékou Touré's called "Africa on the Move", published in English, was finally located in a library. From it the quotation in the **attached** document was extracted.

Sékou Touré's posthumous opponents have been busier than his supporters, so that there is plenty of off-hand denigration of the man to be found, and also plain confusion, as in the current Wikipedia entry, for example.

But there may be other reasons why this man's memory is now so obscure. He left many volumes of speeches, in hard copy, in French. He was keen to leave a legacy. So why has this one-time giant of African politics, formerly a household name all over the world, shrunk so much in terms of reputation?

His own book, "Africa on the Move", gives clues as to why this might be so. It is more than 600 pages long, yet it reads

like the conference report of the general secretary of a trade union federation. It is the kind of document that has the same predictable headings and the same voluminous narrative time after time, as if it was the “matters arising” of an on-going series of unresolved meetings. “Africa Going Round in Circles” might have been a better title for this book.

Judge it for yourself from the quoted part, **attached**. It is clear, at least, that Sékou Touré based his output on “common sense”, and on such touchstones as “efficiency”, “responsibility” and other presumed universal values that constantly crop up in his text. Frankly, it is quite dull and boring. Sékou Touré, contrary to what one might expect after his heroic stand against neo-colonialism in 1958, turns out to be a “neutralist” (his word). His politics are *ad hoc* and appear personal, but are actually made up of the commonplace platitudes that capitalism holds out in front of itself, to cover itself.

Like a typical reformist trade unionist, Sékou Touré rejects the wickedness of capitalism but takes all of capitalism’s lip-service to morality at face value. He never escapes from the ideology of the bourgeois ruling class.

Sékou Touré never mentions any other politician, contemporary or historical. It is not lack of knowledge or mental capacity that renders his work so unscholarly, but the absence of any correspondence with other thinkers. Perhaps this is evidence of simple vanity (simple, but vast).

If so, this would also partly explain the lack of defenders for the memory of a man who quite possibly bored his fellow-Guineans terribly, for the entire 26 years of an egocentric presidency.

For this series, we have sought out the original words of revolutionaries, including Sékou Touré's. But contrary to our own CU practice, we find that Touré shunned the works of others. He ignores them all. His inclusion in our series therefore stands as an example to show that there are those who hold themselves apart from history, and to whom history consequently tends to return the same kind of compliment: neglect. We include him anyway, and allow his supporters to defend him if they will.

In a part of the book not quoted here, Sékou Touré relates how his party (the PDG) is the one in a one-party state. He says that the one-party rule was brought in for the sake of "efficiency". Then he says that subsequent to this original act, he has heard of something called National Democracy which he regards as the same thing as the one-party state. Sékou Touré saw something called NDR, but missed the democracy in it.

Sad to say, Sékou Touré missed the point.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Ahmed Sékou Touré, Africa's Future and the World, 1979.](#)
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